

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Hurricane Katrina Talking Points  
8 September 2005**

**The Overall Mission**

Working primarily in support of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Corps of Engineers is carrying out a wide variety of missions in response to Hurricane Katrina. In addition to our efforts to get the water out of New Orleans we are also providing services throughout the affected areas to include provision of ice, water and temporary power; as well as debris removal and temporary roofing.

**Corps' three priorities are:**

First, supporting efforts to save lives and find people,  
Second, sustaining lives (water and shelter) and  
Third, setting conditions for recovery (cleanup, restoring infrastructure and navigation).

Corps employees are empowered to make decisions regarding hurricane relief support on the spot as long as the decision is lawful, ethical and the employee is willing to be accountable for the action. This has helped keep things moving in a time of difficult communication and confusion.

**Un-Watering New Orleans**

We are doing everything we can to get the water out of New Orleans as quickly as possible. We will provide the public with daily updates on our progress. This is a very complex mission, and it will take time.

Estimates about how long it will take to get the water out of New Orleans are very difficult because conditions are changing daily. As more power is restored, more pump stations become operational, and as temporary pumps are placed, we get closer and closer to making New Orleans dry again. As of noon on Thursday, 3 Sep 05, 28 of 148 existing pumps in New Orleans proper were in operation, and 17 portable pumps were in operation. In addition, 9 of 26 existing pumps in Plaquemines Parish were functioning.

Right now our best estimates range from 24 to 80 days for the city, and there is no way to predict timeframes for when specific areas will be dry. We want to be very careful about giving timeframes because we know there are many people wanting to know when they can return to their homes and businesses. Once the unwatering is complete, several things will need to take place before the city can be reoccupied. These include debris removal, structural assessments and restoration of critical utilities.

The Unwatering Plan developed for New Orleans in 2000 was used as the basis for the actions taking place now. We will make that plan available soon.

### **Finding Human Remains**

This is a very sensitive issue to all of us in the Corps family, and we are doing everything that we can to treat remains with the utmost dignity and respect. These remains are someone's family members, and they deserve our utmost respect.

### **Water Quality Issues**

Everyone is concerned about the quality of water being moved from New Orleans to Lake Ponchartrain, but our first priority is the health and safety of residents of New Orleans and all responders as we get the water out of the city. We are working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ensure human health and safety as we drain the water and have received approval from EPA to move the water following the agency's normal practices in emergencies. EPA is monitoring and testing the water. As we drain the water, we anticipate there will be times when we may need to take additional measures, and we are working with EPA on this right now. Any questions as to water quality should be referred to the Office of Water, U.S. EPA.

### **Global War on Terror Effect on Mission Capability**

The Corps' 35,000 employees have a long history of volunteerism and dedication to assisting our nation in times of need, both at home and abroad. Our overall capability to respond to this and other disasters at home is not diminished by our support to the Global War on Terror.

### **Timeline**

We received an unconfirmed report on Monday morning from local firemen that there was a breach at the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal. Due to its potential significance the Corps' District Commander, Colonel Richard Wagenaar attempted to view the site on Monday afternoon. He was unable to get to the area due to high water, power lines and debris. In their attempts to get to the site, they encountered significant flooding at the I-10 / 610 split. Based on water height at that location it was obvious that significant flooding had occurred. They were able to validate the levee breach on Tuesday, and they began implementing a plan to fix the breach.

## **General Mission Talking Points**

### **Receiving FOIA Requests**

The Corps has received a number of Freedom of Information Act requests from news media over the past several days. The requests have been for inspection reports, evacuation plans, contracts, email and correspondence. We understand the public's need for information about the Corps of Engineers capabilities, projects and performance in responding to national emergencies. Due to the hurricane and flooding in New Orleans, we are unable to access our files in the

New Orleans District Office. In the interim, we will process these requests for records at the US Army Corps of Engineers headquarters in Washington, DC.

### **Hurricane Preparedness**

We are continually monitoring the weather and are prepared to respond, if needed, should another hurricane approach the United States. Although we have more than 1,000 people deployed in support of Hurricane Katrina, we are reconstituting our response capability and have many more employees prepared for any other major storms or other natural disasters. We continue to support our military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as supporting the civil works mission at home.

### **Navigation**

The overall conditions for navigation are encouraging. The Port of Mobile is basically fully operational. There are some minor restrictions and the Coast Guard is still working diligently to put in some aids to navigation to improve the 24-hour operation of shipping in that channel. Pascagoula has some shoaling, but very close to being fully operational. Biloxi and Gulfport still have some restraining obstructions and some shoals in there and the Coast Guard has these two ports closed. We have a couple of obstructions in the mouth of the Southwest Pass in the Mississippi River. We have a contractor on the scene. Subsequent to that we will have a few days of effort by the Coast Guard to reinstall the aids to navigation to get full deep draft operation back up to New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Currently, the Mississippi River is open to shallow draft traffic and to deep draft vessels to 39-foot draft during daylight only.

### **Future Funding**

The President and Congress are currently considering additional funding to assist in the relief and recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina. At the request of the Administration, the Corps of Engineers is providing input regarding the restoration of flood damage reduction infrastructure as well as the inland and deep draft navigation system.

### **Debris Removal Mission**

To date, USACE has received debris removal missions from FEMA for Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The Mobile District is executing a \$32 million debris removal mission. Memphis District will soon be executing a \$1.5 billion debris removal mission for Louisiana.

### **Ice Mission**

As of 7 September 2005, more than 92,000,000 lbs of ice was sent to several operational staging areas in the affected areas in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama for distribution by state and local agencies.

### **Other Missions**

In support of FEMA, the Corps of Engineers will be assessing and repairing public facilities (schools, libraries, fire stations, etc.) for the state of Louisiana. This mission is estimated at \$200 million dollars.

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